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Professional motives in primary school teachers

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to analyze the professional motives of primary school teachers and their relation to the teaching/learning process. This research relies on the historic-cultural paradigm and the activity theory, especially the categories of motives proposed by A. Leontiev and N. Talizina. The study was based on semi-structured interviews with a teacher and six students of the 6th grade of a private urban primary school. It also included analysis of their written narratives and a video recording of a class session. Our findings suggest a relationship between the teacher's motives and the students' learning process.

Keywords: motives, activity theory, historic-cultural approach, learning, primary school.

Introduction. The aim of this study was to analyze the hierarchy of motives in primary school teachers, given that motivations form an essential part of the daily activities of any educator. Teaching/learning is a rather complex process because human beings' actions are driven by an inner force coming from the motivational sphere, that is, any cognitive action has a motivational and affective component. Motivation constitutes the central core of personality. According to the activity theory, action is the object of psychological analysis and its elements can be either materialistic/external or psychic/internal. This theory is based on an integrative approach to motivated behaviour as an expression of personality, one's needs and motivations. What any activity is aimed at is defined as motivations [1]: in other words, motivation always comes from necessity. Starting from the 1970s, "new domains of activity, including professional activity, were accessed for further investigation" [2]. As a result, labor

activity began to be seen as a prototypical human activity. From the psychological perspective, professional motivation is a hierarchical system of motives behind the educator's behavior during teaching.

Material and methods. We conducted a qualitative study based on the application of five instruments: a semi-structured interview with a student; a semi-structured interview with a teacher; a student's written narrative; a teacher's writer narrative; and a video recording of a class session. Our analysis was based on the categories proposed by A. N. Leontiev and N. F. Talizina, which in turn refer to internal or cognitive motives (included in the teaching-learning activity), positive external motives (motives supporting this activity), neutral external motives (motives that do not significantly affect the teaching-learning activity) and external negative motives (motives that affect the activity negatively or disrupt it). A fundamental aspect of our study, from the perspective of the activity theory [3], is that the teaching/learning process is seen as an active process, involving both the teacher and the student. This is a dynamic, recursive and dialectic process, meaning that both the teacher and student are being formed and transformed in the course of their interactions.

Our study focused on the teacher and six students of the 6th grade of an urban private school, which uses an educational model based on the historic-cultural paradigm and activity theory. By applying the instruments described above, we sought to identify the motives (internal and external) that played the key role in shaping the teacher's and students' behavior and the teaching-learning process as a whole.

Results. When analyzing the student information, we observed two cases which exhibited inner positive motivation; nevertheless, given the developmental periodization, the guiding activity development is switched towards social interactions.

As for the teacher, our findings show a consolidated internal motive, as the teacher exhibited a strong commitment to teaching as a professional activity. The teacher also showed a proactive research capacity realized through continuous training. The teacher's positive emotions inspired his students, colleagues and the administration of the school.

Conclusion. As shown by Talizina, Solovieva and Quintanar [4], the activity theory in psychology opens new perspectives for studying education and development. However, to apply this model in an educational

environment is a challenging task. Our findings suggest a relationship between the teacher's motives and the students' learning process.

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